

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

2TX353

.U5

Cap. 2

SEND 10 STACKS

Food Stamp Handbook for Volunteers

You can help
fight hunger
in America.

APR 29 '77

U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
NATL. AGRIC. LIBRARY
FNS-1
1977

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

FNS-1

1977



You and your neighbors have an important role in the campaign to end hunger and malnutrition in America. By helping low-income people get and make good use of the food help available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, you can contribute greatly to the lives of disadvantaged families in your area and thus to the life of the entire community.

For most people, food help is close at hand, right in their own communities. USDA's Food Stamp Program enables low-income households to buy more food of greater variety to improve their diets. The task now is to extend the reach and improve the effectiveness of the Food Stamp Program. Many poor people are not getting the benefits

they should from food help now available to them. Whether it's because of fear, suspicion, lack of motivation, lack of transportation, or physical handicap, there is usually an identifiable reason—a reason that can often be dealt with by concerned citizens of good will who can lend a helping hand. Many individuals and private organizations have asked USDA what they can do to help, and many are already conducting well-planned service projects to help reach low-income people with the food assistance they need for better diets and better health.

This handbook outlines some of the ways you can help poor people improve their diets, and gives you facts about the Food Stamp Program that will be useful to you in your work as a volunteer.

Getting Started

You can make a valuable contribution to the fight against malnutrition in your own community by working individually or as a part of a group. Volunteers can serve the Food Stamp Program in many ways. Some of them are:

- Acting as language interpreters.
- Providing transportation to and from the food stamp office or grocery stores.
- Visiting applicants to assure that all of the necessary documents are available to the eligibility caseworker.
- Assisting clients in filling out their application forms.
- Acting as authorized representatives for households burdened by some kind of physical handicap.

- Operating food stamp information booths.
- Operating "Meals-on-Wheels" centers.
- Assisting local, State, and Federal agencies in carrying out emergency functions during a disaster situation.

First, find out all about the Food Stamp Program and what others may be doing. Here are some ideas for getting started:

1. Get in touch with your local welfare agency to find out about the Food Stamp Program and what volunteers can do. Its telephone number is listed in the same section of the directory as other parts of your county and city government.
2. Find out what other volunteers are doing. You can get leads from:

- The local welfare and health departments.
 - The listing of social service organizations in the yellow pages of your telephone directory.
 - The County Extension Service. The telephone number should be listed along with other offices of local government.
 - Clergymen and other church leaders, nurses, teachers, and the various social action groups.
3. Make personal visits to view volunteer activities and find out what additional help may be needed.
4. If you decide on a project that's new to your community, consider these questions:
- What support can you get from others, including local officials

and leaders of volunteer groups?

- How does your project tie in with what other groups are doing?
- Will there be an overlap or duplication?

5. Find out if your area has a training program for volunteers. Is there a system to coordinate and direct their efforts? Food Stamp Program regulations require that each State operate a food stamp outreach program. One concept of this program is to provide motivation and incentive to private and volunteer groups and individuals for the purpose of enlisting their services to carry out specific outreach activities. The State outreach people may be contacted through the local food stamp or welfare office.

Another good source for additional volunteer information is:

National Center for Voluntary Action

1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20006

an agency that promotes and organizes efforts of government, volunteer groups, and individual volunteers.

Volunteer Roles

In general, volunteers and community organizations can be most effective by devoting their capabilities and resources to activities that fit into five major, interrelated categories:

- Outreach
- Direct Help

- Food Education
- Community Support
- Money

Here are things that can be done by volunteers and groups of volunteers. They can be used as starting points for you.

Outreach

Many poor people, because of isolation, suspicion, ignorance, or apathy, do not know that food help is available. Or, if they do know, they do not know how to go about getting it.

The malnourished need to be informed and motivated. Volunteers can make home visits to public assistance households, prepare posters and exhibits, and operate information booths in grocery stores, employment agencies, welfare offices, health clinics, churches,

neighborhood centers, and other places where people gather.

Direct Help

Transportation is frequently a problem to low-income people, particularly the elderly, the disabled, and those in rural areas. Volunteers can provide transportation, or they can shop and deliver food to shut-ins or people who are ill. Other services might include babysitting while mothers get food stamps or shop, providing clerical assistance for understaffed certification offices, and preparing meals for the children when a low-income parent is either sick or hospitalized.

In addition, the volunteer efforts of concerned individuals and organizations can be particularly helpful in disaster situations. Their assistance during such emergencies

can do much to increase the speed with which families who have been affected by a disaster get the food help they need. The assistance volunteers provide will complement the services of disaster relief agencies, including the American National Red Cross, Salvation Army, and National Guard.

Food Education

Too frequently, poor people use the added buying power of food stamps to buy more of the same inadequate diets they've been getting. Food education in the proper use of meager resources is essential. Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as private organizations, conduct educational programs that need the helping hand and the know-how of qualified volunteers. Such educational activities are conducted at food stamp certification and issuance offices,

grocery stores, neighborhood centers, and person-to-person in homes. In most communities, there are a variety of ways volunteers can help needy persons get food education—including babysitting so that mothers can attend a food demonstration.

Community Support

Volunteers—**people who care**—can find and point out the need in communities not yet fully committed to combating malnutrition. The voices of well-informed citizens can spell the difference between an enlightened attack on a community problem and an illusory belief that there is no problem.

Money

Money for food-related activities can be provided by volunteer agencies and community organizations, both from contributions of

members and from fund-raising activities. In addition to direct help to destitute individuals and families, money can be used for demonstrations on buying, storing, and preparing nutritious meals and for informational purposes.

This Is The Food Stamp Program

There have been reams of information—**and lots of misinformation**—written about the Food Stamp Program. The program was made possible by the Food Stamp Act of 1964.

Here's what it's all about:

- The Federal Government gives extra food-buying power to low-income families who decide to spend a specified amount of their own money for food coupons, commonly known as "food stamps." (Families with little or no income do not have a purchase requirement and get their stamps free.) The face value of the total number of stamps they get is greater than the amount of money they put in. That means extra food-buying power.
- Some terminology you will hear: The amount of money the family converts to stamps is called the "purchase requirement." It is based on the family's net income level and the number of people in the family. The difference between the money they put in and the total

value of stamps they get is called the “bonus.”

- By law, the program is operated through State and local welfare agencies, even though food stamps are by no means limited to people on welfare. You may find some people who would qualify for food stamps but just won't apply because of the “welfare” implications. Remind them that more than half of the people who do use food stamps are *not* receiving any public assistance money.
- In order for a household to be eligible for food stamps, all able-bodied members (with certain exceptions) must register for and accept suitable employment.
- Food stamps are spent in retail food stores to buy food or food

products for human consumption. They can also be spent for seeds and plants used in a home garden to produce food for the eligible household.

Soap, cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, or other nonfood items commonly sold in food stores cannot be purchased with food stamps.

- In communities where they are available, nonprofit meal delivery services, commonly called "Meals-On-Wheels," may be authorized by USDA to deliver meals to food stamp recipients, aged 60 or over, who are physically handicapped, feeble, or cannot prepare all their meals. Also, communal dining facilities, such as senior citizens' centers, apartment buildings occupied primarily by elderly persons, and certain other public

or nonprofit private establishments that prepare and serve meals to the elderly, may be authorized by USDA to accept food coupons from recipients aged 60 or older. Food stamp recipients may use all or a portion of their stamps to pay for "Meals-On-Wheels" or communal dining services.

- What most people refer to as a "family" becomes a "household" under the Food Stamp Program. A food stamp household is a group of people who buy, prepare, and eat their meals together. A single individual can be a "household" if he prepares and eats his food at home, even if "home" is one room.
- Residents of an institution or boarding house cannot be considered a "household" unless the institution or boarding house does not provide meals and

residents have access to cooking facilities. (Rehabilitation centers for alcoholics and drug addicts are exempt from this requirement. Persons living in certain federally subsidized housing for the elderly also are exempt.)

- It's the total **net** income of all members of the household (except that of students under 18 years old) that determines whether the household qualifies for food stamps. The income may be from welfare checks, pensions, Social Security, odd jobs, farming, or other sources. If the total income is below the national eligibility standards, then the household probably can get food stamps.
- As a volunteer, you can help the "head of the household" apply for food stamps by explaining the kinds of records he or she should

take to the certification office. This can be especially helpful to people who are not on welfare and not familiar with application formalities. Anyone applying for food stamps will be required to show:

1. How Many People Are in the Household

Usually, just the applicant's statement, giving names and ages of members of the household, is acceptable.

2. How Much Income the Household Has

Households in which all the members are receiving welfare are automatically eligible for food stamps, without regard to income and resources. For everyone else, income is the key in determining eligibility, the purchase requirement, and

bonus for food stamps. It may also be the hardest thing to pin down unless the applicant knows what papers will be needed. Pay slips showing wages and deductions for all working members of the household are the best records. If pay slips are not available, statements from the applicant's employer are acceptable.

Perhaps an elderly parent is part of the household. Remember that this person's Social Security check must be counted as part of the total income.

Other kinds of income include veteran's benefits, unemployment compensation, Civil Service or railroad retirement, and alimony or support payments. Most people

have records of these—it's a matter of remembering to bring them to the food stamp office.

3. Household Income Deductions

In order to determine a household's eligibility, certain deductions are made from the household's income. These deductions include mandatory items, such as income taxes and union dues, and such hardship expenses as shelter, child care, and medical costs.

For more detailed information on household income deductions, eligibility requirements, purchase requirements, work registration, meals-on-wheels, and other aspects of the Food Stamp Program, see *The Food Stamp Program* (Program Aid No. 1123).

Food Stamp Rights And Responsibilities

The Food Stamp Program in your community did not just happen. Officials in the Federal and State governments had to agree. The agreement sets out certain rights and responsibilities. Every citizen is entitled to know exactly what these rights are.

Civil Rights

No person shall be excluded from participation in the Food Stamp Program, or be otherwise discriminated against, because of race, religious creed, color, national origin, or political beliefs. Food stamps are for all people who qualify.

Right to Privacy

All States have laws and regulations protecting the confidential nature of records and rights of individuals benefiting from food stamps. Some of the questions to be answered in getting food stamps are personal. The records are confidential and are used **only** for making a decision on whether a household can get food stamps and, if so, how many and how much.

Right to Be Heard

Each State welfare department has a method of reviewing appeals by people who feel they have been improperly denied benefits. It is called a "Fair Hearing." States must take prompt and final action within 60 days from the date of the request for the Fair Hearing.

Food stamp-related complaints should be directed to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Office for the county or area.

Responsibilities

Participants must promptly report changes that could affect eligibility or purchase requirement and amount of bonus stamps. Why report changes in number of household, income, rent, or deductions? Because these are the things that can make the difference in the amount paid for stamps and the bonus. If the family gets bigger, they need more food stamps. If a member of the family leaves home, they need less. **All changes over \$25 must be reported within 10 days.**

Crimes and Offenses

Food stamps and the Authorization to Purchase cards (commonly called ATP cards, used by recipients to

obtain food stamps) are obligations of the United States. Any unauthorized use of these documents may result in prosecution.

Penalties for violating the Food Stamp law can be severe and include both a fine and imprisonment.

USDA's Role

The State welfare department administers the Food Stamp Program at the local level, but national supervision of the program is by the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

For More Information

You may contact the local USDA Food and Nutrition Service Office located in or near every food stamp county. You will find the address or telephone number listed under U.S. Government Offices. If you prefer, you may contact the nearest Food and Nutrition Service Regional Office.

Resource Material

There are many good sources of material for use in community outreach programs. Here is a list of printed material available for food stamp outreach activities:

- **You and Food Stamps (FNS-5):** A folder containing general food stamp information printed in both English and Spanish.
- **The Food Stamp Program (Program Aid No. 1123):** A booklet that presents, in question and answer form, specific information on major provisions of the program, including eligibility requirements, household income deductions, work registration, allotments and purchase requirements, special provisions for the elderly, recipient responsibility, and other provisions.

- **Food Stamp Program (FNS-77):** A general information leaflet on the program available in English, Spanish, Samoan, and Yiddish.
- **Shopping with Food Stamps** (Program Aid No. 1109): A booklet describing some of the responsibilities and obligations of a newly-certified food stamp recipient.

Other USDA materials are available. Listed below are catalogues available upon request:

- **Publications of the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS-11):** Write to the Information Division, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.
- **Popular Publications (List No. 5):** General information for the farmer, suburbanite, homemaker, and

consumer. Write to the Office of Communication, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

- **Color Filmstrips and Slide Sets:**

Write to Photography Division, Office of Communication, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

- **Motion Pictures:** Write to the Motion Picture Division, Office of Communication, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

- **Exhibits:** To obtain information on USDA exhibits, write to the Director, Design Division, Office of Communication, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Other good sources of material may be obtained from the County Extension Office and your State Land-Grant College or University.

FNS-1

Revised March 1977

All programs of the Department are available to everyone without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, or political belief.



